



The Food Stamp News

An ONSPI Publication

Summer 2002



Message from the Director

*By Rick Zynda,
Acting Director,
ONSPI*

Greetings! Welcome to the "Food Stamp News." We have

developed this newsletter to provide local agency staff with the most up-to-date information regarding what's going on in the Food Stamp Program (FSP). We understand how important it is to share anticipated program changes and error reduction initiatives with all staff statewide. We intend to use this newsletter to inform you about current events, future plans, error rate trends, and "best practices" in Wisconsin or other states. We will also include special recognition for a job well done or particularly creative and effective error reduction and customer service efforts.

The FSP was reauthorized effective May 13 when President Bush signed the Farm Bill (HR 2646). The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) actively participated in providing input and recommendations during the development of this legislation. There are many new provisions for FSP simplification, eligibility, and benefits in the legislation, and State staff are already hard at work analyzing the State options and possible changes in program policies and procedures. Feedback from local agency staff, food and nutrition organizations, and other interested stakeholders will be crucial as we work through how and when to best use the new options to serve the needs of Wisconsin's FS recipients.

Effective July 1st, the Office of Nutrition Services and Program Integrity (ONSPI),

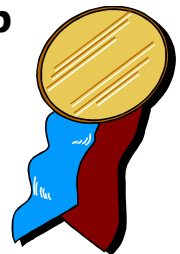
which administers the FSP for the State, will be transferring from DWD to the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS). ONSPI will be joined with other staff involved in Food Stamp and Medicaid program administration to form a new Bureau of Income Maintenance Administration at DHFS. We look forward to developing a stronger partnership with the Medicaid Program administrators and staff. We will make every effort to strive for MA and FS Program policy alignment and simplification wherever possible.

Thank you for all you do everyday to provide the highest quality customer service, including correct and timely benefit determinations for FSP customers. You are the key connection to improving the health and nutrition of Wisconsin's low-income citizens. Without each of you, the program cannot be successful!

Recognition for a Job Well Done

*By Lisa Hanson, Program
Improvement Consultant*

We would like to recognize those agencies and individuals who made a significant difference in Wisconsin's payment accuracy.

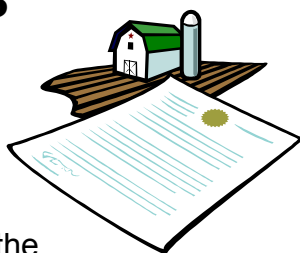


Jenni Dalton, Marathon County

Jenni has not had an error on a Monthly Accuracy Evaluation since 1999. She has been described as an exemplary Community Resource Specialist, always going the extra mile for her customers. She documents well, explains details to customers, listens, follows instructions, and always follows up on her case work. Thank you, Jenni Dalton, for your commitment to food stamp payment accuracy!

Farm Bill and FSP Reauthorization Updates

By Mike McKenzie,
QPE Unit Supervisor



Most of the provisions in the 2002 Farm Bill will be effective October 1, 2002. We are waiting for implementation guidance from FNS before making decisions on any major policy or procedural changes. There are 2 provisions mandated in the legislation. Planning for the necessary CARES changes is underway.

- The standard allowance, currently \$134 for all FS groups, will fluctuate depending on household size.
- The asset limit for FS groups with a disabled food unit member will increase to \$3000 to align with the current policy for food units with an elderly member.

Several State options will also be available in October including,

- Alignment of definitions of income and assets between FS, MA, and/or TANF.
- Semi-annual change reporting option for all households (currently only available for earned income households).
- Treatment of child support payments as an income exclusion, instead of a deduction.
- Elimination of proration requirement of the Standard Utility Allowance in states that choose to mandate the use of standards.
- Allowance to disregard certain reported changes in deductions.
- Restoration of eligibility for federal FS benefits to legal immigrants who have lived in the U.S. continuously for 5 years, legal immigrant children regardless of date of entry, and disabled legal immigrants.
- Elimination of the \$25 monthly cap on transportation assistance for FSET participants.

- Elimination of the requirement that 80% of FSET funds is used to serve ABAWDs.

Local Agency Error Reduction Plans Approved

By Lisa Hanson, Program
Improvement Consultant

Fourteen local agencies have been awarded funding for their error reduction proposals submitted in mid February. Determinations were based on guidelines set by Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), including not being able to pay salary for existing staff and requiring activities to be above and beyond normal food stamp activity. Congratulations to:

Columbia County – development of a “Team Teaching” procedure

Dane and Kenosha Counties – Change Reporting Centers

LaCrosse, Richland, and Rock Counties – hiring an LTE for “Call Back”

Lincoln, Marathon, Oconto, and Winnebago Counties – hiring an LTE for various activities such as outreach and follow-up

Milwaukee County – purchase FAX machines to place in locations for customers to use

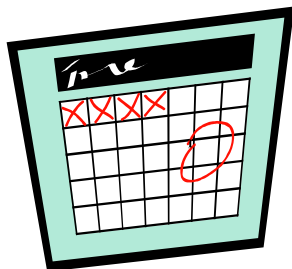
Waupaca County – purchase FAX machines and printers for staff

Sheboygan and St. Croix Counties – purchase equipment for training needs

We would like to thank all the agencies that submitted proposals. It is wonderful to see so many agencies committed to FSP accuracy. This was a learning experience for all of us, and we hope that in the future we will be able to give agencies another chance, so keep your thinking caps on!

Events

*By Lisa Hanson,
Program Improvement
Consultant*



3rd Annual Food Stamp Program Improvement Conference

Lake Geneva March 20-22, 2002

Approximately 440 individuals “Unleashed the Power” at the conference, which provided a wide variety of workshops, a chance to share information with other agencies, and outstanding motivation.

Congratulations to the Milwaukee Policy Power Rangers who won the Policy Pursuit competition and the opportunity to attend the Big Ten Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Urban 13 Workshop

Minneapolis, MN June 13-14, 2002

Hennepin County demonstrated their on-line filing system called the Diamond System, a system where all information is scanned into a database that eliminates paper files. This system has proven to be a great success within this urban area by helping to eliminate the loss of files during the transfer from one agency to another.

Another interesting venture Minnesota is pursuing is a “team” approach. Workers will no longer have individual caseloads but will be assigned to one large caseload and work as a team. Ten workers will be assigned to a “team” and each must take on responsibility for the caseload. Each morning they meet to discuss who will be required to do what activities for the day. This is currently in the testing stages but looks successful so far.

Minnesota has proven to be very successful at maintaining an error rate below the national average and has received enhanced funding. The State of Wisconsin will continue to investigate options from other states in order to improve food stamp payment accuracy.

12th Annual Big Ten Food Stamp Payment Accuracy and Customer Service Conference

Indianapolis, IN August 21-23, 2002

Forty-five state and local staff will be attending the conference to discover what's been successful in other states to reach food stamp payment accuracy.

Investigative Interviewing Training

Statewide August, September, October

Tim Gard will provide “Investigative Interviewing Skills Training” throughout the state. Each agency will be provided with a copy of his current video and workbooks on interviewing techniques for use within their agency. Check out the Training Section's online registration center for dates and locations.

Training Section News

By Jenny Thompson, Training Officer

Phyllis who? The Application Entry Guide (a.k.a. Phyllis) can be found in the library on New Worker Central at <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/destrain/imnwcentral/library.htm>. Scroll down to Desk Aids.

The new online registration center becomes available July 1! Paper announcements will no longer be used. Check out www.uwosh.edu/ccdet/wss to find out what classes are being offered.

Upcoming Training (3rd Quarter)

For a complete list of new worker courses check out <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/destrain/imnwcentral/schedule.htm>.

August: FS Payment Accuracy (Madison); EBT Refresher Training (Madison); Interviewing Skills with Tim Gard (statewide)

September: EBT Refresher Training (Mosinee); KIDS to CARES to Case Comments (Oshkosh); Interviewing Skills with Tim Gard (Madison)

Call Center Update

By Amy Mendel-Clemens, Call Center Supervisor

Many questions and concerns have been raised about what will happen to the CARES Call Center after the transfer of FS and other Income Maintenance programs to DHFS. There will not be a noticeable change in the services to local agencies immediately following the transfer. The CARES Call Center will continue to operate as it is currently functioning.

DHFS and DWD have agreed to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for continued Call Center services after July 1, 2002. If you have further questions, please feel free to call Amy Mendel-Clemens at (608) 266-8733.



DXBM and QC Tips

Follow this link to see a complete listing of DXBM messages and QC Tips issued to date.

http://workweb.dwd.state.wi.us/desbfs/pages_callcenter/dxbm.htm

Policy Update

By Sara Pynenberg, FS Policy Analyst

In April, Wisconsin received waiver approval from FNS to exempt ABAWDs from time-limited FS benefit work requirements and to increase the change reporting threshold for child support income from \$25 to \$100. See Ops Memos 02-26 and 02-29.

Ops Memo 02-31 issued May 8th clarified the policy for establishing voluntary quit sanctions and explained the use of the VQT sanction letter now available in CARES.

We are currently working on policies to clarify procedures for temporary absence or joint custody arrangements. We are also communicating with FNS to establish a new

policy for the use of Standard Utility Allowances in the FS budget.

QA Corner

By Marcia Williamson, QA Specialist-Advanced

There are currently 12 QA Specialists (QAS) located around the state who make home visits and complete quality assurance reviews of FS cases every month. The QAS does a comprehensive review of the FS issuance in a case using a face-to-face interview and CARES information and completes a 14-page federal form. The QAS utilizes the Wisconsin FS Handbook and the federal manual and reviews Wisconsin's specialized waiver policies. There are 6 Specialists-Advanced and Supervisors who then review the initial findings for correctness.

If there is an error of more than \$25, the case is then submitted to the Error Letter Review Team, consisting of staff from CARES, the Call Center, QA, PAC, FS Policy, and the Training Section to further discuss the case. If it is an error, the team discusses what changes can be made – either to written policy or CARES – or recommends training. Don't forget agencies also have a chance to refute the error! Refutations are always welcome, since our goal is to reduce the error rate.

Does it seem like we always choose your "worst nightmare case?" We don't do it on purpose. Federal rules dictate how the random sample is selected. Each month a percentage of the cases reviewed by the State of Wisconsin is selected by Federal QC staff for further review. We continually discuss policies and specific cases with the Chicago staff of FNS in person, by email, and by teleconference in order to achieve more accuracy. Sometimes, even when all the state and agency players agree on a case, FNS will review the case and determine differently.

CARES Update

By Sara Pynenberg,
FS Policy Analyst



In March several CARES fixes went into production that will help ensure payment accuracy. These were communicated on DXBM March 23, 2002. Follow the link in the DXBM and QC Tips section to view them.

On April 19, CARES was programmed to fix the '077' problem where overrides were necessary to issue initial FS benefits in many situations.

On May 24, CARES was programmed to determine FS categorical eligibility correctly when food unit members are eligible for Child Care, W-2, or Kinship Care without requiring workers to use the TANF switch on ANBC.

Programming changes have also been made to help ensure correct 6- or 12-month certification periods for FS. For these fixes to be effective a case must be taken out of review mode, so be sure to confirm all benefits as soon as possible when you use the ASER driver flow.

Planned CARES Enhancements

- Modification and simplification of alerts in CARES related to FS.
- Application Entry Find Function similar to WPFN in the work program sub-system.
- Automatic update on AFUI of SSI income along with eligibility runs if changes are made.
- Automated follow-up letter to be sent to recipients reminding them of their change reporting requirements.
- Automated identification of W-2 companion cases.

FS Handbook Tips

By Dave Hippler, FSHB Writer

Have you ever had trouble finding a topic in the FS Handbook? The online handbook makes finding information easier than ever. There are TWO ways to search for topics:

1) Use the online handbook's search function. In the online version of the handbook, click Search at the top of the page. Then enter the word or words you're

Search for:

looking for in the search field. If you type more than one word, you're telling the computer you're looking for any one of the words, as if there's an "or" between the words you entered.

If you only want pages that list all of the words you enter, separate them with the word "and." For example, if you want to find a page that mentions "life insurance," enter "*life and insurance*" in the field. If you enter "*life insurance*" you'll get pages that mention "life," "insurance" or "life insurance."

2) Use the search engine available through the pdf version of the handbook. Adobe Acrobat has a search engine that is sequential. It will find instances of the search criteria in the order they appear in the handbook. Open the pdf version and choose the binoculars icon (find function) at the top. Enter your search word or words and press enter. This search starts from whatever page you were on when you started your search and highlights the first instance of the search word(s). If you click on the "find again" icon (binoculars with the arrow), you go to the next instance.



Between these two methods of searching the handbook, you should be able to find whatever you need – just remember to spell correctly!

EBT Customer Service

By Judy Woelfel, FS Policy Analyst – EBT

Citicorp Electronic Financial Services (CEFS) is responsible for EBT customer service for Wisconsin food stamp clients. Ninety percent of the calls to 1-877-415-5164 are handled by the Automated Response Unit (ARU) located in the U.S. The ARU can provide the account balance, last ten transactions, and benefit availability date for monthly benefits. Over 220,000 calls are satisfied by the ARU each month.



More than 20,000 calls are routed to customer service representatives each month. The majority of calls are routed to three call centers in Pune and Bangalore, India. Spanish calls are routed to a call center in Tampa, Florida.

CEFS has contingency plans in place to reroute calls from one or more locations in India if circumstances require it. If services become unavailable at all India-based sites, the Tampa facility will receive all calls. Calls may also be directed to other sites in the U.S. The process of redirecting calls to back-up sites can be achieved in less than 24 hours, but there may be temporary delays while staffing is increased at the U.S. locations.

We Want to Know...

What do you think about “The Food Stamp News?” Is there something you’d like to see in a future issue? Do you have a burning question that you’d like to have answered?

Please send your comments regarding the newsletter to Sara Pynenberg. We look forward to hearing from you on ways to make this your best source of valuable FSP information!

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